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ABSTRACT

State, school and community must take responsibility for cooperative educational reform targeted at improving educational opportunities for poor, minority students who are at risk of dropping out of New York State's public high schools. Program recommendations include the following: (1) early childhood education programs; (2) mechanisms to ensure equal educational achievement; (3) innovative learning environments; (4) elimination of limitations on local school districts; (5) greater autonomy for school personnel tied to increased accountability; (6) teacher recruitment, training and in-service policies and practices that encourage respect for racial and cultural diversity; (7) recruitment, retention and promotion of minority and bilingual personnel; (8) study of cultural diversity; (9) services for language minority students; (10) revised special education practices; (11) comprehensive data systems; (12) parent participation; (13) discipline policies and behavior standards; and (14) individualized and group services provided through collaborative arrangements. Fiscal recommendations include the following: (1) fiscal resources to support the program recommendations; (2) consolidation of selected formula aid, and competitive grants; (3) enhanced flexibility in school-based administration; (4) increased state aid; (5) fiscal incentives to school districts for improved performance; (6) enhanced equity in the distribution of State aid; and (7) greater investment in the physical conditions of the schools. A brief bibliography is included. (FMW)

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The Time for Assertive Action

SCHOOL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING THE EDUCATION SUCCESS OF AT-RISK CHILDREN

Report of the Commissioner's Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth At-Risk

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October 13, 1988

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October 13, 1988

Dr. Thomas Sobol
Commissioner
New York State Education Department
Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12234

The charge was to recommend to the Commissioner and the Regents a comprehensive, long-term strategy for improving the education of at-risk children and youth.

Dear Commissioner Sobol:

A year ago you appointed the Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth At-Risk. The charge to the Task Force was to recommend to you and the Board of Regents a comprehensive, long-term strategy for improving the education of at-risk children. As Co-chairs, it was our responsibility to guide the Task Force toward identifying the best strategies for addressing the educational needs of these young people. The report of the Task Force reflects the consensus thinking of the total Task Force membership, although not every member necessarily endorsed every conclusion and recommendation. It represents the best that we could bring to bear and reflects our collective deep sense of urgency. Throughout the deliberations, we have held as a constant standard the advancement of recommendations which would create a school environment beneficial for *all* children, including our own, and especially for at-risk children.

We are pleased to present the final report of the Task Force, "The Time for Assertive Action." The report reflects the Task Force's best understanding of the pervasiveness of the conditions that place children at risk, the complexity of creating positive and lasting change in the institution of schooling and the urgency to forge new and enhanced collaborations among those who are committed to the goal of educating all the State's children.

There is no greater priority for New York State than to improve the prospects that all children will complete a high school program that prepares them for a productive adult life. It is our hope that this report will assist you and the Board of Regents in your efforts to improve the educational experience of at-risk children residing in New York State and eliminate all vestiges of inequity.

Sincerely,

Lionel R. Meno
Former Superintendent
Syracuse City Schools

Bernard W. Harleston
President
The City College of CUNY

Enclosure

CHARGE

The Commissioner appointed a diverse Task Force whose members were broadly representative of all persons committed to improving the education of children and youth at-risk.

We strongly urge that the report and its recommendations provide critical leadership and direction in formulating the 1989-90 State budget and legislative agenda for education.

In September 1987, New York State Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol appointed the Task Force on the Education of Children and Youth At-Risk. The charge to this Task Force was to recommend to the Commissioner and the Board of Regents a comprehensive, long-term strategy for improving the education of at-risk children and youth. In addressing this charge, the Task Force was asked to:

—Identify the children and youth considered at risk, and review the factors which put them at risk;

—Consider the needs of children from birth to young adulthood; paying attention both to adolescents who need help now, and to younger children, so as to reduce the number who will be at risk in coming decades;

—Review promising practices at the State and local levels and determine what additional efforts may be needed;

—Develop comprehensive strategies for the coordination of State and local efforts;

—Propose goals so that milestones of achievement may be identified and accomplished through the decade of the 1990s; and

—Estimate the resources needed to accomplish these goals and offer a plan for generating public and legislative support.

To accomplish this mission, the Commissioner appointed a diverse Task Force whose members were broadly representative of all persons committed to improving the education of children and youth at-risk. Included among our members were teachers, administrators, postsecondary faculty, parents, community advocacy groups and State agency representatives.

As Co-chairs, it was our responsibility to convene the Task Force and to guide our colleagues through a several-months-long process of deliberations about how best to meet the educational needs of all the State's children and youth. This report represents the collective wisdom and experience of the Task Force. Our recommendations are broad, comprehensive and challenging to implement.

We strongly urge that the report and its recommendations be reviewed and enacted by the Commissioner, the Board of Regents, the Governor and members of the State Legislature, thus providing critical leadership and direction in formulating the 1989-90 State budget and legislative agenda for education. It is our expectation that this report will be a catalyst for further targeting public attention and resources on our State's most pressing educational and social equity issue — that of adequately educating *all* the children in New York. The Task Force calls upon local educators, public officials, professional associations, parents, business and industry leaders, community-based organizations and others to use the most promising recommendations in the report as a foundation for undertaking meaningful and sweeping school improvement efforts in their communities.

This State and its communities can make no better investment in our future than to invest in the future of our children — all our children and youth, especially those at risk of not receiving the quality education to which they are entitled. The social and economic consequences of inaction are too great.

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CONTENTS

Charge ii

Task Force Membership iii

Preamble 1

Principles 3

Program Recommendations 5

Fiscal Recommendations 21

Conclusion 27

Selected Bibliography 29

Every day the gap is widening between the life options for children who attend schools in affluent or stable communities and children who attend schools in poor communities.

Too often at-risk children are concentrated in failing schools which have the least resources, the most dilapidated plants, the most dispirited teachers.

Preamble

Every day the gap is widening between the life options for children who attend schools in affluent or stable communities and children who attend schools in poor communities and in rurally-isolated areas. We know that as a nation, one in four children do not graduate from high school. Disadvantaged children in New York State have even more limited educational opportunity than in the nation as a whole.

Our State has the fifth highest dropout rate in the country. Each year more than 44,000 students leave school without completing requirements for high school graduation. Over 60 percent of these students attend schools in our larger cities. Our schools are least successful in educating poor, Black and Hispanic children. In New York City, which enrolls more than 77 percent of the State's Black and Hispanic students, as many as three out of four Blacks and four out of five Latinos fail to complete high school within the traditional four-year period.

The very large number of children who are separated from schools before high school graduation and the disproportionate percentage of minorities, limited English-proficient students and children from low-income families among these numbers is a strong indictment of some of our schools as institutions and their inability to provide meaningful educational experiences for all children.

Too often at-risk children are concentrated in failing schools which have the least resources, the most dilapidated plants, the most dispirited teachers. The environment in these schools is unsafe and unhealthy. It is so alienating that most of the children are not even being taught to read and write. The lesson reinforced is that the educational establishment does not care about them. Yet for those poor and minority students who do persevere to graduation, we can not guarantee that they have attained the skills and knowledge needed to obtain adequate employment, to develop functional competence, to nurture interest in further learning and to participate actively in the life of their communities.

Children and youth at-risk are being failed by various institutions of our society. They are young people who do not have a complete network of support from their communities, their families, the schools, churches and other major institutional spheres. The lack of the direct support of these institutions serves to alienate them and deny them access to more productive channels of socialization and acculturation.

It would be naive to think that many of the factors that put students at risk spring up suddenly at the time students reach high school. Poor academic achievement, excessive absence and other indicators begin to surface at a much earlier age, and are themselves merely symptoms of more serious social and economic problems. Poverty and unequal educational opportunity exist early and can have important consequences for later development. Many of our children are at risk even before they begin school, given their economic and familial circumstances. Growing up poor or in a single-parent family or with parents who themselves are high school dropouts increases the likelihood that children will have difficulties with schooling.

The cost of not addressing the underlying causes of failing schools and dropping out is staggering. The social and personal costs include foregoing national income and tax revenues, increased reliance on social services,

We hold the Commissioner, Board of Regents, the Governor and the Legislature responsible for providing the leadership needed to rescue the children of New York.

poor health conditions, greater probability of criminal activity, reduced political participation and suppressed intergenerational mobility.

Two different systems of education have been created in our State. One encompasses effective schools holding high expectations for their students and located in affluent or stable communities; the other, ineffective schools which communicate low expectations and aspirations for their students, who are not given full opportunity to succeed. They are too often located in large urban areas and the inner cities. Our society's acceptance of two unequal educational systems is putting us at risk of creating a permanent underclass in New York and our nation. The existence of this underclass will ultimately erode the foundations of our democratic society. We are on our way to becoming two nations — one of the rich and privileged and the other of the poor and disadvantaged.

Racism clearly underlies much of the problem. It has a devastating impact on our economic, political, social and educational life. In education, racism is expressed in a variety of ways: inadequate resources to those most in need; perpetuating segregated schools; and in some schools, the tracking of minority students into less rigorous academic programs without regard for individual abilities, interests and potential.

We hold the Commissioner, Board of Regents, the Governor and the Legislature responsible for providing the leadership needed to rescue the children of New York. The goal of this Task Force is to create a school system in which the children who are now at risk of not succeeding are given equal opportunity and the support they need to succeed. We feel strongly and deeply that there is a profound sense of urgency about this mission. A continued strong State commitment to education and a sustained allocation of resources to our schools are essential to making the Governor's Decade of the Child a reality. New York State can no longer countenance what others have characterized as a state of emergency, an epidemic of failure. This Task Force insists that action is the only appropriate response. And in our recommendations, we have identified the actions we believe are necessary.

The issues posed in the Regents charge to the Task Force were discussed at length with Task Force members sharing their personal knowledge of at-risk children, programs to serve them, the educational system, and related issues. Early in these discussions, the members recognized that complete agreement on all issues would be impossible. Therefore, a policy was established that final decisions would be arrived at by consensus of the group. Consensus was defined as near unanimity. It was agreed that while Task Force decisions would be made through a voting process, a simple majority vote such as 15 to 14 would not be acceptable.

To reduce the risk of failure, there must be a joint effort by the schools and other social institutions to ameliorate the lives of these children.

All children are capable of learning what is necessary to graduate from high school, and all children have an entitlement to a quality educational experience that makes high school graduation a meaningful reality.

Principles

The educational needs of at-risk children cannot be separated from their social needs. What makes these children at high risk for failure in school are social and economic circumstances that place them in communities with limited resources, inadequate schools, struggling families and deteriorating social conditions. To reduce the risk of failure, there must be a joint effort by the schools and other social institutions to ameliorate the lives of these children. The recommendations put forth by the Task Force are directed, first, to improving the educational experience, and, second, to developing a system of support services that may reduce risk. These are overlapping domains. Interventions have to take place simultaneously in both domains.

We recognize that there are other strategies that lie beyond the educational system that must be undertaken if the State of New York is truly committed to alleviating the burdens of disadvantaged families: economic opportunity, welfare reform, housing, health care, affirmative action, transportation and other social reforms. However, the charge of this Task Force was to concentrate on the educational plight of at-risk children. In our transitional society, with extremely high rates of family dissolution, mental health problems, substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy and violence, few children are risk-free. In this respect, our recommendations apply to all children. Yet, some children, identifiable because of the communities in which they live, are in critical need of social interventions to forestall immediate devastating consequences. We believe these children deserve our highest priority. It is the time for assertive action.

The foremost belief of this Task Force is simple:

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT MUST BECOME A REALITY FOR ALL OF NEW YORK STATE'S CHILDREN

All children are capable of learning what is necessary in order to graduate from high school, and all children have an entitlement to a quality educational experience that makes high school graduation a meaningful reality. We, as a society, cannot — or should not — have lower expectations for some students or tolerate less than the highest standards of performance for all our students. Several principles are directed at actualizing this fundamental tenet:

- **Individual differences in children must be respected.**
- **Racial, ethnic and cultural diversity must be respected and infused into instruction, extracurricular activities, staffing and in the overall ambience of the schools.**
- **Teachers and administrators must be given a greater responsibility in the management of schools and the development of curricula.**
- **Commitment to promoting the highest quality of teaching is a prerequisite to school improvement.**
- **Fundamental change is essential, including the possibility that some schools may require complete restructuring.**
- **Accountability for the conditions that put children at risk educationally is shared among schools, families, and the community.**
- **Services and programs must start early, be planned comprehensively and be better coordinated.**

- **Resources must be targeted to districts in distressed communities and, within districts, to schools with the greatest concentrations of at-risk students.**

- **The State Education Department must take a leadership role in school improvement through the establishment of statewide standards for student achievement and regulations which support achievement of those standards.**

This section presents recommendations for improving the education and school experiences of the thousands of children in New York State who are at great risk of not completing high school, and, as a result, will be denied future opportunities for full participation in the economic, social, cultural and civic life of their communities.

Program Recommendations

This section is devoted to a presentation of the Task Force's recommendations for improving the education and school experiences of the thousands of children in New York State who are at great risk of not completing high school, and, as a result, will be denied future opportunities for full participation in — and contribution to — the economic, social, cultural and civic life of their communities. The recommendations are organized into two categories. The first set of recommendations, if enacted, would promote systematic educational reform and school improvement. The second set is targeted to enhancing the support services which are so essential for retaining at-risk children in school and ensuring that these children have the opportunity to take full advantage of their entitlement to public education.

Educational Reform and School Improvement

1. Initiate developmentally-appropriate **early childhood education** programs for all children starting in communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged families.
2. Develop mechanisms to ensure that **equal educational achievement** becomes an institutional reality, including implementation of supportive policies, the provision of adequate resources and routine monitoring to track compliance.
3. Support innovation creating **flexible and diverse learning environments**, ranging from individualized instruction to the restructuring of some schools.
4. Revise the **Regents Action Plan** to eliminate elements that are restrictive and that limit the options available to local school districts to address the needs of at-risk students.
5. Provide greater **autonomy in decision making** to school-based personnel for hiring staff and other personnel practices and for the development of curricula, tied to increased accountability for educational performance.
6. Revise **teacher recruitment, training and in-service** policies and practices to enhance the quality of teaching at-risk students and to ensure that all educational personnel understand and respect racial and cultural diversity.
7. Recruit, retain and promote **minority and bilingual personnel**.
8. Provide all students with instructional experiences which include the accurate **study of the culture, history, and struggles** by which diverse groups have sought to become full participants in American society.
9. Mandate **instructional and support services to language minority students** which develop their native language and cultural assets and provide them with opportunities to acquire academic English language proficiency.
10. Revise practices, as necessary, involving **special education** programs to ensure accurate referral, assessment and placement of at-risk children and to avoid stigmatizing students.
11. Develop comprehensive **data systems** to provide accurate information regarding student attendance, achievement and retention and to increase accountability for

The recommendations are organized into two categories: the first would promote systematic educational reform and school improvement; the second is targeted to enhancing the support services which are so essential for retaining at-risk children in school.

student performance and school improvement.

12. Provide meaningful and consistent **opportunities for parents to participate** in school-based decision making and other school activities as essential partners in the educational process.

13. Develop **discipline policies and behavioral standards** which promote a school environment conducive to learning and student retention.

Social Supports and Ancillary Services for At-Risk Children and their Families

14. Provide **individualized and group services** to at-risk students necessary to meet their instructional, developmental and social needs.

15. Ensure that health, cultural, recreational, job-related and social services are available to at-risk children and their families through **collaborative arrangements** with public and private institutions and community agencies.

Children enrolled in prekindergarten programs have experienced greater school success, greater likelihood of high school graduation and further education; increased employability...; and less criminal activity.

The Regents...should institute major expansion of school and community-based prekindergarten programs so that all children at or below 200 percent of the poverty line will have access to such programs.

Educational Reform and School Improvement

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Initiate developmentally-appropriate early childhood education programs for all children starting in communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantaged families.

Early childhood education programs receive strong affirmation from research which has demonstrated that children enrolled in prekindergarten programs, compared with children who were not, have experienced greater school success, greater likelihood of high school graduation and further education, increased employability, greater lifetime earnings and less dependence upon public assistance, and less criminal activity. Findings from the State's experimental prekindergarten program confirmed the research. The prekindergarten experience reduced by 30 percent the number of children who could have been expected to make less than normal progress.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Institute major expansion of school and community-based prekindergarten programs so that all children from families at or below 200 percent of the poverty line will have access to such programs. This initiative must take into account parental preference and need for part-day and full-working- day programming.
- Request $1.0 million to create six pilot comprehensive child development centers. The centers would offer a consistent continuum of developmentally-appropriate child care, health care, education, social services and parental involvement in one central location for children six months old through the second grade.
- Improve preservice training for early childhood education teachers through collaboration with the Department of Social Services, which has regulatory supervision for many sites where these personnel teach. The two agencies should also jointly develop advisory guidelines for districts and other program providers concerning qualifications, screening, salary scales, and procedures for job applicants.
- Provide enhanced technical assistance and other incentives to districts for the planning, implementation, operation and evaluation of early childhood education programs.

Local School Districts should:

- Cooperate in establishing comprehensive early childhood education programs involving children, parents and other family members. The programs would offer parent education, prenatal and postnatal health care, nutritional guidance and child care for preschool and school-aged children.
- Develop referral networks for families with young children to include social service agencies, community organizations, health care facilities, and education and training agencies.
- Expand early screening, preventive services and intervention on behalf of children with handicapping conditions. Services could then be provided either through district-sponsored preschool special education programs or through suitable placements identified by local Committees on Special Education with the goal of ensuring access to appropriate placements for all children in need.

Minority students and youth from low-income families are much more vulnerable to dropping out than other students and are more likely to attend schools which are overcrowded, deteriorating and have limited resources.

The Regents should make available State funding for staff development programs for school districts whose racial/ ethnic composition is changing.

- Provide in-service training to early childhood education teachers and paraprofessionals focusing on the needs of at-risk children such as knowledge and appreciation of racial, cultural and linguistic diversity; effective parent communication; recognition of abuse; and cooperation with social service agencies.
- Support implementation of native language prekindergarten instructional programs for language minority students and ensure a multicultural perspective in programs for all children.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Develop mechanisms to ensure that equal educational achievement becomes an institutional reality, including implementation of supportive policies, the provision of adequate resources and routine monitoring to track compliance.

Data have shown that not all the State's youth complete high school at similar rates. Minority students, particularly language minority students, and youth from low-income families are much more vulnerable to dropping out than other students, and are more likely to attend schools which are overcrowded, deteriorating and have limited resources. Students must have the support and resources to overcome institutional barriers that currently exist in schools. Also, local educators — boards of education, superintendents, principals and teachers — are obligated to create school environments that do not tolerate lower expectations or inferior education for some students.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Make available State funding for staff development programs for school districts whose racial/ethnic composition is changing due to the increasing numbers of minority students who make up the State's school-age enrollment.
- Develop a language policy statement articulating that all language minority students have an educational entitlement to develop within the public school program, full fluency and literacy in English *and* their home language based on an appreciation for the cognitive, economic, social, cultural and psychological benefits of dual language development for these students and all students in New York State.
- Make public data demonstrating the extent of racial isolation in New York State schools and how these data are correlated with other data related to the school environment.

Local School Districts should:

- Conduct staff development activities to promote understanding and appreciation for the cultural and linguistic assets of all students.
- Review the participation rates of students by race/ethnicity in selected courses (such as advanced mathematics and science, vocational education and special education) to determine whether minority students are either under- or over-represented. If so, develop strategies for more equitable participation.
- Adopt policies and educational programs which will provide parents and their children greater choice in selecting the schools they attend within the district and the course of study they pursue.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Support innovation creating flexible and diverse learning environments, ranging from individualized instruction to the restructuring of some schools.

In those districts where educationally at-risk students constitute a rela-

Educators must create, within the school building, a variety of meaningful and challenging learning paths to high school graduation.

School districts should initiate schools within schools, house plans or other strategies intended to break down the anonymity of large and overcrowded school buildings.

tively small percentage of the school population, special supplemental programs can be designed to serve the needs of the potential dropout while the schools continue to educate the remaining students with traditional programs. However, in urban districts and some rurally-isolated areas where dropping out is often the rule rather than the exception, more fundamental and systematic change is required. Educators must create, within the school building, a variety of meaningful and challenging learning paths to high school graduation so that all students may pursue a course of study which is responsive to their interests, skills and needs.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Create a State-supported $10.0 million fund for educational innovation. Grants from the fund would be awarded on a competitive basis to provide matching monies for local school districts which have annual dropout rates higher than the statewide average. The grants would be awarded after a review of a school-based, community-supported plan for promoting flexibility in learning programs leading to graduation.
- Advocate expansion of magnet schools and special interest schools in which student selection procedures are designed to promote choice for students of all academic abilities and ensure racial/ethnic diversity.
- Extend the school year to offer flexible attendance schedules and opportunities for more in-depth study of specific subjects.
- Develop an alternative high school level program modeled after the Regents College Degree program, where a central academic file is maintained and credits toward a diploma may be earned through competency testing, assessment of acquired life skills and course work completed in a variety of educational and training settings. This program would maintain the traditional diploma standards but would provide flexibility in how they could be met.
- Undertake a review of State law and Commissioner's Regulations to amend any identified regulatory obstacles to school districts implementing the innovative program approaches.

Local School Districts should:

- Initiate schools within schools, house plans or other strategies intended to break down the anonymity of large and overcrowded school buildings.
- Offer courses at flexible hours including early mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends to accommodate learning styles, family commitments and work schedules of students.
- Develop five-year high school diploma programs that combine academic skills remediation, vocational training and social skills development.
- Assign itinerant teachers to travel outside the classroom to bring individualized or small group instruction to chronically absent students, dropouts, homeless children or other students unable to attend classes regularly due to family or employment commitments. Instruction could be provided in welfare hotels, shelters, public buildings such as libraries and museums, residences or at job sites.

School reform efforts must be focused at the point of learning: the school and the interaction between administrators, teachers and students.

The Regents should develop and promulgate a means by which local boards of education and individual schools could apply for "block variances" from the Part 100 Regulations for innovative, locally-developed school plans and advocate for $10 million in additional State resources to support the Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (CSIP) process.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Revise the Regents Action Plan to eliminate elements that are restrictive and that limit the options available to local school districts to address the needs of at-risk students.

It is a most appropriate role of the State Education Department to establish standards for performance outcomes for all students in the State. As a component of this leadership, the State should establish periodic benchmarks for determining students' satisfactory progress toward those educational outcomes and for providing accountability of local districts for operating effective programs which will ensure satisfactory progress for their students. However, the Regents Action Plan and Part 100 of the Commissioner's Regulations are placing significant burdens upon school administrators through requirements for numerous new tests, new statewide curricula and increases in course sequences to the extent that student access to certain courses of study, such as vocational education, is curtailed.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Convene immediately a representative group of local school administrators, school boards, teachers, parents, students, and community groups to identify obstacles to school-based management and effective programming contained in both the Regents Action Plan and Part 100 of the Regulations and recommend specific revisions which would overcome them.

  Specific components of the Action Plan and Commissioner's Regulations which the Task Force recommends this group examine are: the middle school program, the foreign language mandate, remediation requirements and the additional course requirements for graduation. The group should also examine the recision of any portion of the Regents Action Plan that impedes the responsibilities and capacities of local school boards, school officials, and teachers for achieving and maintaining high student achievement.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Provide greater autonomy in decision making to school-based personnel for hiring staff and other personnel practices and for the development of curricula, tied to increased accountability for educational performance.

School reform efforts must be focused at the point of learning: the school and the interaction between administrators, teachers and students. Teachers, administrators, local boards of education, parents, community human service agencies and business and industry are both willing and able to engage in school improvement efforts which will best address the needs of the individual students who reside in their local communities. The involvement of all these partners is essential in order to build a sense of investment and ownership in what occurs daily in the classroom and school building. With this sense of ownership will come greater accountability of educators to the students and communities they serve, since the partners will expect a significant return on their investment in the school improvement efforts.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Develop and promulgate a means by which local boards of education and individual schools could apply for "block variances" from the Part 100 Regulations for innovative, locally-developed school plans. The

Task Force members recognize the critical importance of the teacher's role in educating at-risk students, since the foundation of education is what occurs within the classroom and the relationship between the teacher and the student.

The Regents should collaborate with faculty from postsecondary institutions with teacher education programs to develop model strategies for including the study of issues related to at-risk students into the curriculum for professional preparation.

Department should encourage proposals from districts or schools which promote the progress of students through the elementary and secondary grades at an individualized pace and only after periodic assessment of competencies rather than strictly by "seat time" or age.

- Advocate for $10.0 million in additional State resources to support the Effective Schools Consortia and the Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (CSIP) process. Funds would be awarded to school buildings based on Commissioner's approval.

Local School Districts should:

- Ensure that district and school building CSIP plans clearly address the educational and developmental needs of at-risk student populations.
- Implement school-based models for joint decision making involving principals, teachers, other staff, parents, students and community representatives.
- Experiment with the implementation of effective schools practices which have been demonstrated to be successful in the professional literature.
- Conduct staff development programs which would train teachers and building administrators to implement effective models for school-based decision making, planning and management. Similar training programs should be conducted for parents and community representatives who also participate in decision-making activities.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Revise teacher recruitment, training and in-service policies and practices to enhance the quality of teaching at-risk students and to ensure that all educational personnel understand and respect racial and cultural diversity.

While the practice of teaching was not specifically the focus of this Task Force, the members recognize the critical importance of the teacher's role in educating at-risk students, since the foundation of education is what occurs within the classroom and the relationship between the teacher and the student. For this reason, the Task Force is obligated to make several broad recommendations concerning teachers and teaching.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Adopt the recommendation of the Commissioner's Task Force on the Teaching Profession calling for the creation of a professional practice board which would ensure that all entrants to the profession have adequately mastered the basic knowledge and skills needed to perform competently.
- Collaborate with faculty from postsecondary institutions with teacher education programs to develop model strategies for including the study of issues related to urban education, multicultural education, individualized instruction, effective schools and the needs of at-risk students into the curriculum for professional preparation. Information about course offerings and related support for teacher preparation currently being developed through the Teacher Opportunity Corps and the Stay in School Partnership programs should be compiled and disseminated widely.

School districts should conduct in-service training to enhance teachers' capacity to offer individualized instruction, motivate at-risk students, communicate effectively with parents, and work with community organizations.

The recruitment, retention and promotion of minority and bilingual personnel must be a priority for State and local educators.

- Advance legislation which would offer precollegiate students the opportunity to learn about teaching as a possible career option.
- Request support for pilot programs to develop nontraditional professional preparation programs for persons who demonstrate potential for teaching but who have previously pursued other careers.

Local School Districts should:

- Conduct in-service training to enhance teachers' capacity to offer individualized instruction, motivate at-risk students, communicate effectively with parents, and work with community organizations.
- Collaborate with postsecondary teacher preparation programs to improve the quality of this training. Prospective teachers should have more frequent exposure to students and have experience teaching students with a range of abilities and a variety of backgrounds, under the supervision of experienced and exemplary teachers.
- Conduct regularly scheduled in-service programs, including language and culture immersion programs, focusing on increasing multicultural awareness and appreciation and enhancing the interpersonal communications skills of professional, paraprofessional and support staff, regardless of the racial/ethnic composition of enrollments.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Recruit, retain and promote minority and bilingual personnel.

The recruitment, retention and promotion of minority and bilingual personnel must be a priority for State and local educators. This challenge can be examined in terms of the need or demand for such personnel and in terms of increasing an available pool of qualified personnel, the supply side of the equation. On the demand side, three considerations are important. Foremost, minority and bilingual staff can be positive role models for minority students by building caring relationships, helping to strengthen self-esteem and encouraging aspirations for success. This is particularly important for minority students who are at-risk and reside in disadvantaged communities characterized by family stress, social turmoil and the lack of economic opportunity. Secondly, for nonminority students, daily interaction with minority and bilingual school personnel who hold positions of authority and responsibility can help to eliminate cultural/ethnic stereotyping and help engender respect and appreciation for different cultures. Thirdly, the recruitment, retention and promotion of minority and bilingual personnel are important for advancing equity within the education professions.

Concerning the supply of qualified minority and bilingual personnel, efforts should be increased to make teaching more attractive, particularly in schools that enroll at-risk children and youth. Barriers to the recruitment and retention of such persons should be identified and removed.

Current statistics indicate the urgent need to increase the representation of minority and bilingual personnel among school personnel. Minority students comprise an increasingly larger percentage of the State's public school enrollment: 21.0 percent in 1966-67 to 37.5 percent during 1986-87. While minority students make up more than one-third of the student population, minorities comprise only 12.2 percent of the professional staff in schools (teachers, principals, department heads and others). During 1986-87, approximately half of the

The Department should forward legislative proposals for the vigorous recruitment of minority persons into certification areas in which minorities are currently underrepresented.

Schools districts should reassess the results of their affirmative action policies to determine if their efforts have been effective.

Schools must work to ensure that they foster the racial and cultural understanding and respect needed to promote the self-esteem of at-risk students.

State's school districts (369) had no minority professional staff.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Analyze the distribution of minority school professional staff by area of certification to identify those certification areas in which minorities are currently underrepresented. The Department should then forward legislative proposals for the vigorous recruitment of minority persons into these areas. The Task Force echoes the recommendations of the Task Force on the Teaching Profession related to establishing a statewide loan forgiveness program and expansion of the Empire State Challenger Scholarships and Fellowships program.
- Sponsor a statewide career exploration program in teaching and related fields in education for precollegiate minority students.
- Develop mechanisms, such as a clearinghouse on teacher and support personnel vacancies or a directory of job applicants, to assist districts in their minority recruitment efforts.
- Seek State funding to conduct leadership training institutes for minority district staff.
- Review and revise certification standards for bilingual teaching so that the number of persons qualified to teach bilingual education can be increased promptly without sacrificing pedagogical and program quality.
- Provide technical assistance to local districts in strengthening their affirmative action programs.

Local School Districts should:

- Reassess the results of their affirmative action policies to determine if their efforts to recruit, hire, retain and promote minority and bilingual teachers, counselors, administrators and paraprofessionals have been effective.
- Conduct leadership training activities and develop promotional opportunities for English as a second language and bilingual teachers and guidance counselors.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Provide all students with instructional experiences which include the accurate study of the culture, history, and struggles by which diverse groups have sought to become full participants in American society.

Numerous studies dealing with the educationally at-risk student have demonstrated that a primary ingredient in successful strategies for improving student retention is the building of a positive self-image and an expectation of success for students. A key component to enhancing student self-esteem is the fostering of understanding, appreciation and respect for different races and cultures. Daily, school administrators and teachers communicate attitudes about different races and cultures through what is taught — or not taught — in the classroom, e.g., the curriculum and through what is communicated to students by way of school policies, interactions with staff, disciplinary procedures and extracurricular activities. Schools must work to ensure that these "messages" foster the racial and cultural understanding and respect needed to promote the self-esteem of at-risk students.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Review systematically all syllabi and other curricular materials developed by the Department to ensure that these materials are infused with an appreciation of racial

School districts should work with parents, staff, students and community organizations to conduct instructional and extracurricular activities which celebrate racial and cultural diversity and the contributions of all racial/ethnic groups to the life of the local community.

The Regents should raise the exit criteria for bilingual instruction and establish programmatic guidelines which address academic and other needs of language minority students to include transitional instruction and continued language development rather than remediation.

and cultural diversity and an understanding of the impact that racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination have had on the development of human societies.

- Provide technical assistance to schools in developing instructional materials which accurately reflect the contributions made by minority populations to the social, political, economic and artistic life of our society.
- Require K-12 syllabi that address racial and cultural understanding and the role of diversity in a pluralistic society.

Local School Districts should:

- Review instructional materials used by their staffs to ensure that these materials are infused with an appreciation of racial and cultural diversity and an understanding of the impact that racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination have had on the development of human societies.
- Work with parents, staff, students and community organizations to conduct (1) instructional and extracurricular activities for students and (2) special programs, including student exchange programs, for the community, both of which celebrate racial and cultural diversity and the contributions of all racial/ethnic groups to the life of the local community.
- Demonstrate their commitment to respecting all cultures by infusing this respect into every interaction with students and parents. Services for students and parents must be designed with sensitivity to their culture, customs and language.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Mandate instructional and support services to language minority students which develop their native language and cultural assets and provide them with opportunities to acquire academic English language proficiency.

All students, regardless of their native language, are entitled to a meaningful public education that adequately prepares them for productive adult lives. Fulfilling this entitlement for students who are not native English speakers is a challenge that many districts have not yet met. The current criteria for bilingual instruction is too restrictive. The Task Force is deeply concerned about the adequacy of both instruction and support services for students who have some English language proficiency but who have not yet acquired strong English language skills. We strongly believe also that bilingual instruction, at all levels, must simultaneously encourage native language proficiency while teaching English language acquisition, and that language development can not be taught from a remedial or "deficit" model of instruction.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Raise the exit criteria for bilingual instruction to the 40th percentile and establish programmatic guidelines which address academic and other needs of language minority students between the 23rd and 40th percentiles to include transitional instruction and continued language development rather than remediation.

Local School Districts should:

- Assess immediately local bilingual education programs to determine whether they currently include quality native language and transitional instruction. If not, develop curricula to meet this need.
- Review guidance and other support services available to language mi-

Schools districts should review guidance and other support services available to language minority students to ensure that all these students have access to bilingual support services.

The Regents should monitor school district referrals to determine any discrepancies in referral rates based on race or language background and require corrective action in districts where discrepancies are identified.

nority students to ensure that all these students receive such services from bilingual school personnel or have access to bilingual support services through cooperative agreements with community-based organizations.

- Offer continuing education opportunities and sabbaticals for English as a second language and bilingual teachers and guidance counselors.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Revise practices, as necessary, involving special education programs to ensure accurate referral, assessment and placement of at-risk children and to avoid stigmatizing students.

The Task Force is particularly concerned about assessment practices which lead to inappropriate referrals to special education classes or to the stigmatizing of students by assigning negative labels to them. Low test scores on standardized academic performance tests or a conventional discipline problem which an individual teacher is unable to resolve are insufficient and inappropriate justifications for referrals to special or alternative education programs.

We are also concerned with the continued use of culturally- biased assessment instruments, procedures and policies and the critical shortage of bilingual clinicians, such as school psychologists, school nurses, social workers and educational evaluators who are qualified to conduct assessments and interpret their results. Both have led to the overrepresentation of minority and limited English proficient populations in special education classes conducted by many districts.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Develop and make available immediately assessment and evaluation instruments in all languages currently identified as native languages spoken by New York State students.
- Disseminate advisory guidelines for local school districts to promote culturally nonbiased assessment policies and procedures.
- Undertake pilot programs to assist local districts in improving their assessment of students. The first would test the feasibility of developing individualized education and support services plans for at-risk students. The second pilot project would develop and test computer-assisted assessment instruments.
- Monitor local school district referrals to determine any discrepancies in referral rates based on race/ethnicity or language background and require corrective action in districts where discrepancies are identified.

Local School Districts should:

- Review current special education placements to determine whether any student subpopulation is overrepresented in special education classes. If so, the district should modify their referral, assessment and placement practices.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Develop comprehensive data systems to provide accurate information regarding student attendance, achievement and retention and to increase accountability for student performance and school improvement.

Underpinning efforts to improve school effectiveness is the enhancement of data collection and reporting systems which allow for the timely, accurate and routine gathering and organizing of data which measure progress toward clearly defined objec-

Databases can be powerful tools for educators to: (1) plan services for at-risk students through better identification of students and more thorough assessment of their needs; and (2) improve the identification of groups of children who are at-risk to address barriers to equal educational opportunity.

The Regents should expedite the Department's current efforts to develop and implement statewide the Student Information System (SIS) which will contain a core biographical record and a unique identification number for every student.

tives. Databases can be powerful tools for educators to: (1) plan services for at-risk students through better identification of students and more thorough assessment of their needs; (2) improve the identification of groups of children who are at risk to address barriers to equal educational opportunity; (3) enhance coordination in the delivery of services; (4) modify ongoing program operations to improve effectiveness; and (5) increase accountability and improve program evaluation. At a minimum, a good database will include *student performance data* and *program performance data*.

Current data practices have many limitations. At the State level, data practices are limited by the inability to make valid comparisons across districts because of inconsistencies in how districts define data elements and in the methods used to collect the data. Also, there are concerns about the appropriateness of comparing districts or states without placing those comparisons within the context of the different student populations schools enroll and the differences in local capacities to generate resources. At the district level, policy making is often limited by the level of analysis. The manner in which data are collected at the school building level, or even by grade within a school, can mask important differences among subpopulations which often determine resource allocation decisions. Second, local school administrators tend to rely heavily on the results of standardized tests, which are limited in their ability to assess domains such as reading comprehension, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Expedite the Department's current efforts to develop and implement statewide the Student Information System (SIS) which will contain a core biographical record and a unique identification number for every student.
- Undertake a study of sample districts to determine both the methodologies local school personnel use to calculate dropout rates and the accuracy of these methodologies. Findings of this study with recommendations for improving local practices should then be disseminated to districts.

Local School Districts should:

- Cooperate with the State Education Department in its efforts to standardize procedures for tracking students, data collection and reporting.
- Assess their current data collection activities to determine their adequacy for program planning purposes.
- Conduct independent reviews or audits of their data to verify accuracy.
- Collect and publish data on dropouts and high school completion rates by race/ethnicity, using analyses of actual class cohorts.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

Provide meaningful and consistent opportunities for parents to participate in school-based decision making and other school activities as essential partners in the educational process.

The family is the primary institution in our society for shaping the development of children. As such, parent involvement is vital to creating a positive educational program for the young. Parents are themselves teachers, helping to form values, attitudes and behaviors. Within the schools, parents can be tutors re-enforcing classroom instruction, they can be advocates for their children in dealings with school administrators and teach-

The involvement of the parents of at-risk students is particularly critical because of the need to provide these students with every possible assistance in order to bolster their often marginal academic performance and to have an advocate for them within the school building. Efforts to promote parental involvement may include activities to address the educational needs of parents.

School districts should provide opportunities for parents to participate in school decision making as well as in program planning and evaluation through mechanisms such as active parent councils, parent associations and program advisory committees.

ers, and they can be valuable resources in planning school programs and activities. Parents can also assist in setting expectations for student performance and behavior held by school personnel and can hold schools accountable for their children meeting those expectations.

The involvement of the parents of at-risk students is particularly critical because of the need to provide these students with every possible assistance in order to bolster their often marginal academic performance and to have an advocate for them within the school building. However, it is the parents of at-risk students who are often least likely to be involved with the schools. This may be for a variety of reasons including: excessive energy and time required to provide for the family's basic needs; the parent's own negative attitude toward, or experience with, school; as well as language and cultural barriers. Efforts to promote parental involvement may include activities to address the educational needs of parents.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Seek legislation to support pilot projects to create parent resource centers, parent leadership corps, parental ombudsman programs, and parent/teacher/administrator case management teams within school buildings located in economically distressed communities.
- Disseminate models of successful programs promoting parental involvement.
- Evaluate the feasibility of granting high school or postsecondary education credits for participation in successful parent education programs.
- Request an additional $2.0 million of State funds to provide grants to local school districts to conduct education programs that include parental training in basic life skills, the role of the parent and the child-parent relationship.

Local School Districts should:

- Conduct educational programs that address the specific needs of their students' parents. Specific activities could include: English as a second language classes, GED preparation, immigration assistance and occupational training courses.
- Encourage parents to use school facilities by offering courses and events of special interest to them. Specific activities could include: recreational programs, personal development courses and funding of parent associations.
- Enlist parents to act as tutors, mediators for disciplinary actions, mentors, teacher aides, library assistants, family outreach workers and special events coordinators.
- Provide opportunities for parents to participate in school decision making as well as in program planning and evaluation through mechanisms such as active parent councils, parent associations and program advisory committees.
- Conduct training programs for parents to enhance their capacity to participate in schools-based governance activities.

RECOMMENDATION 13:

Develop discipline policies and behavioral standards which promote a school environment conducive to learning and student retention.

Each school building has an explicit curriculum — what is formally taught in the classroom — and an implicit curriculum —the values and attitudes communicated to students through their daily interactions with adults in the school building. Research conduct-

The Regents should develop guidelines to assist schools in assessing their disciplinary policies and suggest activities which schools may undertake to improve at-risk students' perceptions about those policies.

Each at-risk student needs to develop a positive relationship with at least one caring adult within the school who can help the student negotiate the educational system, mediate discipline conflicts, provide referrals to support services and help the student build self-esteem.

ed by Gary C. Wehlage indicates that an overwhelming majority of students who either eventually dropped out or who graduated but did not pursue further education had more frequent negative interactions with adults in terms of suspensions and probations and perceived their school's disciplinary policies as unfair, ineffective and impersonal. These same students also believed teachers had very little interest in them.

Schools, to be effective at retaining at-risk students, must devote energy, planning and resources to developing the implicit curriculum. The school environment must communicate to all students that they are safe, valued and respected.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Develop guidelines to assist schools in assessing their disciplinary policies and suggest activities that schools may undertake to improve at-risk students' perceptions about those policies.
- Undertake a study to determine the extent that involvement in disciplinary actions affects decisions about dropping out and the extent to which at-risk students with disciplinary histories are being "pushed out" because of the schools' inability to provide these students with constructive alternatives.
- Request $500,000 to partially support programs to replicate school and family mediation programs. Under the joint sponsorship of districts and appropriate community-based organizations, volunteers would be trained in conflict resolution, the legal rights of students and parents, and relevant Education Law and Regulations. The mediator would then be available to assist in conflicts related to student assessment, eligibility for special services, disciplinary actions and academic performance issues.

Local School Districts should:

- Involve students in setting standards for acceptable behavior and the consequences for unacceptable behavior.
- Establish student courts or similar mechanisms, fully supported by teachers and administrators, to adjudicate discipline situations.
- Offer courses in law-related education.
- Develop peer counseling programs as an alternative to suspensions and as an opportunity for students to develop leadership skills and self-awareness.

Social Supports and Ancillary Services for At-Risk Children and their Families

RECOMMENDATION 14:

Provide individualized and group services to at-risk students necessary to meet their instructional, developmental and social needs.

Children who are likely not to complete high school are put at risk frequently by personal and social problems occurring outside the school building including: family stress, substance abuse, violence and adolescent pregnancy. To improve the likelihood that these students will graduate, schools must take into account the "whole" child when planning educational programs. It is essential that schools provide at-risk children with the self-awareness, self-esteem and coping skills necessary for these students to reduce the barriers to learning these problems represent. Each at-risk student needs to develop a positive relationship with at least one caring adult within the school who can help the student negotiate the educa-

It is essential that schools pay attention to the need for ancillary support services that can help children cope with problems which may not be educational in nature but which often impinge on the children's ability to learn.

The Regents should promote collaboration at the State level through advocating the creation of fiscal incentives for local entities to cooperate and to better coordinate current State funding sources which are targeted for at-risk children among agencies.

tional system, mediate discipline conflicts, provide referrals to support services and help the student build self-esteem.

Identification of at-risk students, through a timely and accurate individual needs assessment, is the first step in providing effective intervention for these students. Assessments which address both educational and support services needs form the basis for determining each student's plan for instruction and services as well as each student's legal entitlement to that instruction and services.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Seek funding sufficient to support mandated guidance services for all elementary school students, which should be part of a comprehensive education and support services plan.
- Advance legislative proposals for fellowships, scholarships and loan forgiveness programs to attract and retain language and racial/ethnic minorities in postsecondary education programs that prepare pupil services professionals.

Local School Districts should:

- Conduct periodic staff development programs for school professionals and paraprofessionals who provide guidance and support services for at-risk students.
- Institute individualized plans for at-risk children, documenting requisite support services, instructional sequences and student progress. These plans should use a case management approach.

RECOMMENDATION 15:

Ensure that health, cultural, recreational, job-related and social services are available to at-risk children and their families through collaborative arrangements with public and private institutions and community agencies.

Children in economically and socially distressed communities are vulnerable to a complex web of conditions, school-related and otherwise, such as family stress, poor housing, substance abuse, violence, adolescent pregnancy, unemployment, and poor nutrition and other health problems. It is well documented that these problems are often predictors of school failure and eventual dropout. Families in disadvantaged communities do not often have access to services or have the resources to help their children overcome some of these negative conditions.

To improve the likelihood that at-risk students will stay in school and succeed, it is essential that schools pay attention to the need for ancillary support services that can help children cope with problems which may not be educational in nature but which often impinge on the children's ability to learn. School personnel can provide some of these services; many other services could be provided more cost-effectively through collaboration with local community agencies, either on the school site or in convenient nearby locations. Community agencies can provide a variety of direct services to address academic, economic and personal needs of at-risk students which are beyond the traditional ability of schools to provide.

The Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department should:

- Promote collaboration at the State level through advocating the creation of fiscal incentives for local entities to cooperate; better coordination of current State funding sources which are targeted for at-risk children among agencies; and flexibility in program mandates in

School districts should seek the active participation of local human service and community-based organizations in the planning and delivery of support services within the schools or at nearby convenient locations.

School districts should upgrade the quality of school-funded support services through in-service training with a focus on the needs of at-risk students and a sensitivity to racial, cultural and language differences.

situations where variances to mandates may offer potential for developing more effective program approaches.

- Increase funding for the Schools as Community Sites program and expand the number of participating schools. Collaborate with other State agencies to pool categorical program funds from the different agencies to enhance the diversity of services that can be provided by these comprehensive school-centered social services delivery systems in economically distressed neighborhoods.
- Review Commissioner's Regulations to encourage the most flexible and productive collaborative arrangements with community agencies.
- Undertake an assessment of current categorical programs serving at-risk students to develop administrative procedures and technical assistance strategies to encourage local coordination and to further disseminate information about local projects. The Department should examine for each program: eligibility criteria, scope and evaluation standards, and identification of "service gaps" or what additional services are needed to enhance programs.
- Work with the Council on Children and Families to disseminate information about State initiatives and funding opportunities to serve at-risk children as well as to function as a mediator and ombudsman whenever barriers to more effective local coordination among activities funded by the Department and another State agency are identified.
- Provide technical assistance to schools with concentrations of at-risk students to develop the capacity to integrate social and support services into their school programming.

Local School Districts should:

- Seek the active participation of local human service and community-based organizations in the planning and delivery of support services within the schools or at nearby convenient locations. Specific services that could be made available include: comprehensive health care; family life education; substance abuse, family and legal counseling; job preparation and placement; academic enrichment and tutoring; recreational activities and cultural events.
- Participate in establishing local coalitions of community organizations and social service agencies serving at-risk children and their families to better coordinate use of local resources.
- Develop a comprehensive and formal system of referral between school staff and community agencies with the appropriate sharing of information concerning the children and families being referred.
- Upgrade the quality of school-funded support services through in-service training, with a focus on the needs of at-risk students and a sensitivity to racial, cultural and language differences.
- Create initiatives such as release time or in-service education credits for district staff to participate in civic and community events.

Resources must be found to implement the recommendations of this report through the reallocation and innovative use of present resources and by generating new sources of revenue.

A commitment must be forthcoming from the Governor and the Legislature to sufficiently fund programs targeted for at-risk children and youth. Funding must also be provided by local governments and school boards to meet fully the needs of at-risk children and youth as outlined in this report.

Fiscal Recommendations

We declare to the Governor, the Legislature, the Regents, Commissioner and the people of the State that there is no higher need, among the many facing the State, than the education of our children and, specifically, the education of those children who are at-risk.

Resources must be found to implement the recommendations of this report through the reallocation and innovative use of present resources and by generating new sources of revenue. A commitment must be forthcoming from the Governor and the Legislature to sufficiently fund programs targeted for at-risk children and youth. Funding must also be provided by local governments and school boards to meet fully the needs of at-risk children and youth as outlined in this report. Financial support must be allocated at a level which is sufficient to ensure that the duration and intensity of services to at-risk children are appropriate to meet their needs, and that all children eligible for services receive them.

Principles

Funds should be targeted. Funds from all sources — State, local and Federal — must be targeted to those school districts and to schools within districts with concentrations of at-risk students.

Funding streams must be consolidated. Currently, funding is too often provided as categorical aids to address only certain symptoms or conditions. Consolidation is essential if local educators are to develop coordinated and comprehensive programs.

Funding should promote institutional change. Funding formula aids and competitive grant award criteria should be reformulated to promote institutional change within schools rather than simply "adding on" new programs.

Flexibility in the local use of funds must be enhanced. Funding strategies adopted by the Legislature should encourage program innovation and replication of proven initiatives.

Increased student performance should not be penalized by State aid reductions. The methodology for distributing State Aid too often results in districts losing aid as they record improvements in student performance. This can be a disincentive to improvement.

State aid earmarked for at-risk students should be supplemental. Local educators have the obligation to use funds provided by the State Legislature for at-risk programs to supplement, not supplant, other funds they currently used for such programs.

State aid must be distributed based on need, thereby promoting equal educational opportunity. Distressed communities and their schools generally enroll the highest concentrations of at-risk students. Yet, these communities and schools have the least capacity to generate local resources to support school improvement efforts.

Accountability for expenditure of funds must be improved. New York State will expend approximately $8.0 billion on elementary and secondary education in 1988-89, in addition to the monies budgeted from local and Federal sources. The magnitude of this investment demands a better accounting of educational expenditures and outcomes, both in respect of the total investment and the focused investment on the at-risk student.

The following funding recommendations are reflective of the general prin-

In addition to the appropriation of additional resources it is important that the Regents aggressively advocate for more cost-effective allocation of existing resources to accomplish much of what we have suggested, particularly the diversity of technical assistance and staff development activities.

Increased local flexibility, combined with fiscal accountability to ensure the most effective use of State funds, is essential to addressing the needs of at-risk students.

An initial step would be a modified version of the Regents Public Accountability for Comprehensive Education (PACE) proposal in which funds would be distributed based on an "educational risk index."

ciples outlined above and are directed to the Regents, Commissioner and State Education Department:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Advocate new fiscal resources to support the program recommendations of the Task Force.

The Task Force is firmly convinced that additional resources are essential if this State is fully committed to improving the educational experience, and therefore, the future lives of *all* New York's children. This is why the program recommendations of this Task Force advocate several initiatives which require new appropriations. When developing our recommendations, we were indeed mindful of the State's current budget shortfall and, therefore, very selective in recommending requests for new funds. In those cases where the Task Force has done so — such as in calling for a major expansion of prekindergarten programs and pilot projects for promoting parental involvement and improving special education assessments — it is our opinion that the requests are absolutely essential to achieving the goals we have established.

Several other program recommendations do not specifically request additional funds to support them. It is apparent, however, that many of these recommendations do have fiscal implications. It is important that in the coming year, both the Regents and the Department aggressively advocate for adequate resources. In addition, all parties should seriously examine more cost-effective allocation of existing resources to accomplish much of what we have suggested, particularly the diversity of technical assistance and staff development activities.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Consolidate selected formula aid programs.

The present approach of funding a large number of State programs directed toward at-risk students lacks flexibility, in that each program has only a limited number of activities which can be supported and only specific student populations who are eligible. This often results in the funds received by a district dictating the activities a district is obligated to undertake, rather than having priorities established based on locally-identified needs. Increased local flexibility, combined with fiscal accountability to ensure the most effective use of State funds, is essential to addressing the needs of at-risk students. An initial step toward the simplification of the State Aid formula and a significant step toward enhancing school-based management and accountability would be a modified version of the Regents Public Accountability for Comprehensive Education (PACE) proposal.

For 1988-89, the Regents recommended consolidation of five categorical aids (PSEN, PCEN, Diagnostic Screening, Early Grade Intervention, and Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention) which could be used by districts for the following activities in combinations appropriate to meet local needs: remedial interment, counseling, class size reduction, parent involvement, and staff development. The consolidated aid would have been distributed to districts based on the concentration of school-aged children living in economic deprivation as measured by enrollment in the Free or Reduced Lunch program.

The Task Force strongly supports the consolidation of the categorical aids and the purposes for their expenditure as delineated in the PACE proposal. However, the Task Force recommends that the criteria for distribution of the aggregated funds be the concentration of school-aged children and their families experiencing "educational risk" rather than economic deprivation as originally pro-

The Regents should advance a legislative proposal which would authorize the Commissioner of Education to issue exemptions from the requirements to file multiple expenditure plans to selected districts receiving funds from several categorical aid programs for at-risk students.

The Task Force urges the Regents to advocate legislation to consolidate the Youth-At-Risk and Community Partnerships, the Stay-in-School Partnership, and the Schools as Community Sites programs.

posed under PACE. The Task Force recommends the use of an Educational Risk Index accounting for the concentration of educational needs of populations served by the school districts. Variables such as school attendance, grade retention, and PEP scores could be used to compile the index.

As with PACE, accountability for the expenditure of public funds would be enhanced under this modified recommendation. Districts and school buildings with less than acceptable performance would have to account for the use of all the consolidated funds. Districts needing substantial improvement would be required to develop detailed instructional plans and more effective basic skills programs for at-risk students to be approved by the Commissioner prior to implementation. Increased flexibility in expenditure decisions and less prescriptive reporting requirements would be accorded school districts with generally favorable performance.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Enhance flexibility in school-based administration.

Currently, many of the categorical State aid formula programs require local districts to submit separate expenditure plans to the State Education Department. If a district receives funds under more than one program, the district must file more than one plan. This often results in an inordinate amount of time and effort being devoted to planning and documenting the separate expenditures made for each program, and acts as a disincentive to coordinate funding streams at the local district or school building level.

The Regents should advance a legislative proposal which would authorize the Commissioner of Education to issue exemptions from the requirements to file multiple expenditure plans to selected districts receiving funds from several categorical aid programs for at-risk students. To be eligible for the waiver, a district would agree to submit a single comprehensive plan for the use of the aggregated amount of funds made available to that district under the various categorical programs.

This local consolidation would allow a district to develop a broad program directed toward at-risk pupils, which would be financed through existing formula categorical aids. This approach would also have the incentive of significantly reduced administrative and paperwork burdens. Annual renewal of the waiver would be predicated on the district making satisfactory progress toward the goals and objectives stated in the comprehensive plan.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Consolidate selected competitive grant programs.

The State Education Department administers a variety of competitive grant programs targeting services to at-risk students. Each program has its own appropriation, legislative mandates, timelines, regulations and scope of allowable activities. Separately, the impact of each is limited. The Task Force urges the Regents to advocate, and the Legislature to enact, legislation to consolidate the Youth-At-Risk and Community Partnerships, the Stay-in-School Partnership, and the Schools as Community Sites programs into a single competitive grants program with funding made available to school districts and BOCES in collaboration with postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations.

These programs are recommended for consolidation since they share the goal of enhancing student retention and performance through the provi-

In its 1988-89 proposal, the Regents recommended approximately half (49.4 percent) of the total aid increase would be for programs serving educationally at-risk pupils.

State Aid actually allocated to schools for at-risk programs represented only 9.7 percent of the total State aid increase.

The Task Force recommends that the Education Department develop a program of educational improvement incentives for districts serving large numbers of at-risk students.

sion of direct services to at-risk students through institutional partnerships. The consolidation of these programs into a single program would allow for greater targeting of fiscal resources to schools in communities with the greatest educational need.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Designate annually 50 percent of the increase in State aid for programs serving at-risk students for the Decade of the Child.

The problems associated with at-risk students constitute an educational crisis, and as such, a major financial commitment by the State is required. The Board of Regents, in its 1988-89 State aid proposal, recognized this need and recommended that 38.0 percent of the total increase in State aid for elementary and secondary education be attributable to the consolidation of five major programs targeted to at-risk students. When other proposals directed toward at-risk students are considered, the Regents recommended approximately half (49.4 percent) of the total aid increase would be for programs serving educationally at-risk pupils.

State Aid actually allocated to schools for 1988-89 did not stress increased funds for at-risk programs to the same extent that the Board of Regents proposed. Increased funds for at-risk programs represented only 9.7 percent of the total State Aid increase.

If reducing educational risk is a major goal of the State, then New York must clearly demonstrate greater financial commitment. To ensure this commitment, the State Legislature and the Governor should earmark 50 percent of the State Aid funding increase for programs benefitting at-risk pupils.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Promote fiscal incentives to school districts for improved performance.

State aid is sometimes viewed as offering disincentives for educational achievement. For example, the aid attributed to Pupils with Special Educational Needs (PSEN) in 1988-89 will be approximately $15.0 million less than in 1987-88. The reason for the decline is that the Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) test results used to distribute aid were updated with many districts demonstrating improved student performance. Ironically, some school districts would have received more State aid if their PEP results had not improved. Fiscal pressures associated with less PSEN aid, however, could lead to the elimination of the programs most responsible for the educational improvement.

The Task Force recommends that the Education Department develop a program of educational improvement incentives for districts serving large numbers of at-risk students. For example, in districts with the largest concentrations of pupils falling below the Statewide Reference Point on PEP tests, current year results could be compared with a base year. These districts would then be entitled to an incentive award based on the districts' relative rates of improvement in pupil achievement.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Enhance equity in the distribution of State aid to the public schools.

In 1988-89, New York State will provide approximately $8.0 billion in general support to public schools. A major purpose of State aid is to promote equal educational opportunity through the equalization of fiscal resources

Current State formulas need to be revised so that adequate aid will be provided to the poorer districts.

An option for enhancing the State investment in the schools would be a $4.6 billion categorical building aid program for school buildings over 40 years of age.

among school districts so that the quality of education provided students is not dependent on the wealth of the community in which schools are located.

Current State formulas need to be revised so that adequate aid will be provided to the poorer districts. Improvements needed include: *a substantial increase in the operating aid ceiling; less reliance on the use of flat and save-harmless grants in awarding general operating aid*, which tends to partially negate the equalizing aspects of other aid factors; *use of more accurate wealth measures* since real property wealth data may be eight years old and personal income data may be incorrectly assigned to school districts; and *an increased reliance on socioeconomic need indicators to distribute State Aid* to reflect that schools in poorer communities have more difficult challenges to maintaining acceptable standards for educational progress.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Advocate a greater investment in the physical conditions of the schools.

The physical condition of our schools is a reflection of the value we, as a society, place on our children. The deteriorating conditions of New York's public schools are deplorable and require a major investment in physical plant. Classrooms, science and mathematics equipment, computer-aided instructional systems, office information and management systems, and professional staff space also need to be significantly upgraded.

The State must share the cost of necessary, but unfilled, capital expenditures. This could be accomplished through a statewide bond issue where State funding would be provided for school building construction, rehabilitation and remodeling costs, and the purchase of equipment and computer hardware. Another option for enhancing the State investment in the schools would be a $4.6 billion categorical building aid program for school buildings over forty years of age.

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The recommendations are many because of the urgency of the problem: each year of inaction the State loses thousands of young people to dropping out.

Conclusion

Children do no place themselves at-risk. Conditions in society and our institutions over which children have no control put them at-risk. The conditions which place children at-risk educationally are numerous. They are pervasive, both within the schools themselves and outside the schools. They are interrelated in complex ways, making it impossible to develop a single, concise solution or course of action.

Accountability for the perpetuation of conditions which put children at risk is shared among schools, families, local communities, State government and the larger society. Therefore, responsibility for developing effective solutions is also shared. To reduce risk, educators must fundamentally reform both the content and the process of schooling as well as become active partners in seeking comprehensive strategies to ameliorate the social and economic distress experienced by many families in our inner cities and rurally-isolated communities.

The Board of Regents, as the State's chief educational policy maker, has the obligation to provide statewide leadership for educational excellence through the setting of student performance expectations and monitoring progress toward those standards, through the provision of technical assistance and advice, and by advocating, at the State and national levels, for priorities and resources. Local educators have the obligation to provide all students with the instruction and support they need to meet standards established by the Regents, to provide on-going staff development, to assist students most vulnerable to dropping out, and to participate in school-based planning and management. The Governor and the Legislature have the obligation to appropriate adequate resources and enact legislation which will assist educators in promoting fundamental school improvement.

The recommendations contained in this report are, by necessity, numerous and broadly stated. The recommendations are many because of the urgency of the problem: each year of inaction the State loses thousands of young people to dropping out. The task may appear to be difficult and expensive, but the cost of ignorance, lost productivity and the outlays for social programs are more costly. Inaction is not an acceptable alternative. Educators, together with State government, must take the leadership in assuring that all students, especially those at risk of leaving school prematurely, benefit fully from their entitlement to a meaningful public education and that all children reach maturity having obtained the skills, knowledge and attitudes essential to being productive adults contributing positively to the quality of life in their communities.

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